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ABSTRACT

Grammar can have meaning and be of use to the learner depending upon the methods of instruction that are being used. The eight traditional parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverbs, prepositional phrase, conjunction, pronouns, and interjection) can be made useful for learners by giving concrete, semi-concrete, and abstract examples when pupils engage in composing ideas to be presented to others. Looking for agreement of subject and predicate in writing is a useful task. Pupils also need to understand sentence patterns, five of which comprise most sentences in the English language. Each of these types of sentences can be dramatized to provide meaning. Pupils also need to learn the four basic ways of enlarging or expanding sentences: using modifiers, using appositives, subordinating one sentence to another; and compounding sentences. Pupils need to know the reasons why a language operates. Thought must go into knowing how a language operates, and further thought must go into implementing what is known about a language. (RS)

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GRAMMAR REVISITED IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS

ED 373 356

Pupils needs to study grammar that is useful and functional. Too frequently, grammar has emphasized the learning of rules, parts of speech, and how words are used in sentences without having learners perceive how grammar can help to communicate more effectively orally and in writing. Grammar does not have a reputation of securing the interests of pupils. But does it need to be that way?

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The Parts of Speech

How much stress should the language arts place upon pupils understanding the eight parts of speech in traditional grammar? I believe that it can have meaning and be of use to the learner, depending upon methods of instruction that are being used. A noun names a person, place, or thing in traditional grammar. This definition can be understood by learners quite clearly. Here, the teacher needs to use concrete materials first in teaching pupils what the meaning of a noun is. Thus words like dog, cat, man, and woman, among others, can be represented by what is real. the child then can see the dog, the cat, the man, and the woman. It is salient that the learner can see the realia as the word "noun" is taught to pupils in concrete situations. I would substitute the semi- concrete for the concrete when it is convenient to do so, such as substituting a picture for each of the animals and people named above. Good teaching also emphasizes that the teacher proceed from the concrete to the semi- concrete in teaching-learning situations. Next, the abstract phase of learning needs to be emphasized with learners seeing the words on the chalk board for the animals and people being referred to. The abstract word could also be presented simultaneously with the realia and the picture pertaining to each noun named above.

The verb in traditional grammar can also be presented very meaningfully to pupils. Verbs are defined as words that indicate action or a state of being. Action can readily be shown to pupils with a dramatization. Words such as walk, run, swim, and crawl can be

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dramatized by learners such as two children "walk" in front of the classroom. A picture may also show action with the concept of "walk" therein. The abstract word "walk" should be printed on the chalk board as it is presented with the real action and/or the illustration showing action. A state of being verb such as is, are, was, were, am, among others, is much more difficult to present meaningfully. Perhaps, meaning can be better attached by learners to these verbs that indicate a state of being in traditional grammar by thinking of these words as representing present or past tense. The words "is", "are", and "am" represent something happening now or at the present time whereas the words "was" and "were" refer to the past. The happening has already occurred with the words "was" and "were." Present and past tense of verbs can readily be dramatized by pupils. For example, a pupil is walking in front of the classroom. The word "is" must be a verb since this word can be change to past tense. The past tense of "is" which is "was" can also be dramatized by the same or a different pupil in that the action has been completed. Thus state of being words may easily be recognized as verbs if the action word(s) in a sentence can be changed from present to past or past to present tense.

A third part of speech, in any order, in traditional grammar is the adjective. Adjectives tend to answer the questions of which, what kind of, and how many. These three questions need answering pertaining to a noun. Notice the following sentence: Those two tall boys walked down the road. The word "boys" is a noun since here it names a person. Which boys were there? The answer is "those" as compared to other boys that might have been walking in the same area.What kind of boys? The answer is "tall." These were tall boys as compared to those of smaller stature. How many boys were there? The answer is "two." Adjectives are used to describe nouns and can make the content more clear and accurate when communicating orally or in writing. I believe the learner can find grammar useful and meaningful if examples are given in the concrete, semi- concrete, and the abstract when pupils engage in composing ideas to be presented to others. Also, a game may be played with pupils when seeing sentences on the chalk board such as the above

named sentence "Those two tall boys walked down the road." Thus pupils may provide other adjectives than the word "those" which answers the question 'which" pertaining to the boys. Other words which may be used here to describe boys in relationship to the question "which" include "these." There are an endless list of words that could answer the question "what kind of" in relationship to the word "boys." These include "short," "young," "handsome," and "bright." In answer to the question of "how many" pertaining to the noun "boys," the following among others would be salient — "some," "few," and "many." Many pupils become fascinated with a study of grammar when they realize that the structure or pattern of the sentence stays the same although there may be a substitution of words. Brainstorming for words can stress higher levels of cognition in learning.

Adverbs, as a fourth part of speech, answer the questions of "how," "when," and "where" in relationship to verbs within a sentence. Consider the following sentence: The girl ran slowly in the garden yesterday. The word "ran" is a word of action and is a verb. How did the girl run? Slowly. When did the girl run? Yesterday. Where did the girl run? In the garden. In the garden is a prepositional phrase used as an adverb. A single word adverb can be illustrated with the following sentence — The girl ran there. Where did the girl run? There. Either single words or prepositional phrases can be used as adverbs. The same is true for adjectives such as in the following sentence: The boy with the blue coat plays baseball. The words "with the blue coat" represent a prepositional phrase. How is the prepositional phrase used? It is used as an adjective answering the question of "Which boy is it? The answer being 'with the blue coat."

That brings us to the next part of speech in traditional grammar which is the prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase starts with a preposition which shows a relationship among/between objects and people. Notice the following sentence: The girl sat in he chair. The word "in" is a common preposition and shows a relationship between the girl and the chair. This relationship indicates a person such as "girl" and "chair" whereby the former is in the latter. Prepositions can be

readily dramatized so that meaning and understanding are inherent in what is being said or written. Thus a girl could sit in a chair. The girl could also sit in front of, beside, in back of, beneath, on top of, and near the chair. Each of the underlined words is a preposition. Additional common prepositions are on, for, among, beneath, and below. When I took an undergraduate course in grammar, memorization of common prepositions was stressed when and for taking the next test. I recommend that pupils, however, understand the meaning of prepositions through dramatizing. Ultimately with functional use, prepositions may be committed to memory. In the sentence " The girl sat in the desk," There are numerous substitutions that can be made for the preposition "in" and yet the sentence pattern stays the same. Thus the girl could have sat in front of the desk. Substitutions can also be made for the other words in the sentence — The girl sat in the desk. Just think of all the nouns that could take the place of the word "girl," or all the verbs that might take the place of the word "sat." The same would be true of the word "desk." Here, pupils may play with words and develop their vocabularies. I have seen many learners who enjoy this activity and do not consciously wait for recess or dismissal time.

Conjunctions as a sixth part of speech can be made meaningful to pupils. Conjunctions join together words, phrases, and clauses of equal value. The teacher could have two volunteers walk separately in front of the classroom. Sentences given by pupils to describe each action would be the following: Janet walked. Bill walked. Now the two sentences could be joined together which would then read as follows: Janet and Bill walked. Monotony is spared here by joining the nouns Janet and Bill. These nouns are of equal value. Pupils should also see how verbs can be joined together. Consider the following actions: Nadine sang. Nadine danced. To reduce repetition, one can say, "Nadine sang and danced." Two action words of equal value are joined together with a conjunction. Less commonly used conjunctions are the following: but, or, for, and nor.

To dramatize phrases, pupils may show the following as an example: Mabel walked into the room and near her desk. Here, the

conjunction "and" joins two prepositional phrases used as adverbs — "into the room" with "near her desk."

A seventh part of speech emphasizes the pronoun. A pronoun substitutes for a noun. Writing and speaking would be rather monotonous if pronouns were not used. For example, notice the following: Jack walked to school. Jack ran part of the way to school. Jack liked to ride his bicycle to school if Jack did not have to drive against the wind. Jack became tired after a while.

The above writing can be made more interesting by using a pronoun instead of the noun Jack. In the second sentence, one can substitute the pronoun "he" for Jack. In the third sentence, the noun Jack is used two times. Certainly, the word and pronoun "he" could substitute for Jack when it is used the second time within a sentence. Thus, pronouns have a definite and meaningful use. Pupils need to learn to use pronouns when necessary. Commonly used pronouns for learners are the following: she, my, mine, our, ours, they, them, I, you, it, and we. These should be used by pupils in functional activities.

The eighth and last part of speech in traditional grammar is the interjection. Interjections are easy to dramatize. They are words that show strong feeling and in written work end with an exclamation mark. Notice the following interjections which learners might dramatize:

1. Wow! That tasted good.
2. Ouch! That hurts.

A study of gramma: then can be interesting and meaningful for pupils. Is a study of grammar useful and utilitarian? I find that looking for agreement of subject and predicate in writing can be very useful. Thus a singular subject should have a singular predicate in standard English. Which of the following sentences has agreement of subject and predicate?

1. One of the boys run to town.
2. One of the boys runs to town.

The second sentence is correctly written since "One" is the subject and is singular. "Runs" is a singular verb. "Nouns" are used as subjects of sentences and can be either singular or plural. With the third person singular subject, Many verbs that match with the subject end in "s." Knowing "person" as a concept then can be quite valuable for learners. First person is the person speaking such as "I did this," or "We did this." "I" is singular whereas "We" is plural. Second person indicates the person spoken to, such as "You went to town." The speaker is speaking to another person such as "you." Third person indicates a person spoken about such as "Bill plays basketball."

Grammar lessons and units can be complex when taught and indicates a need to establish a carefully designed scope and sequence. To be knowledgeable about grammar and its use, pupils also should understand sentence patterns. There are five commonly used patterns. These include the following without expansion:

1. Marty swims; subject – predicate pattern.
2. Joe caught the ball; subject- predicate– direct object pattern of sentence.
3. The girl is skillful; subject – predicate (linking verb) – predicate adjective.
4. John is an athlete; subject – predicate (linking verb) – predicate noun.
5. Mother gave Julia a doll; subject –predicate – indirect object - - direct object.

The above enumerated sentence patterns account for most of the sentences in the English language. Each of these sentences can be dramatized to provide meaning. Words can be brainstormed to replace any single word within the sentences. Learners can write sentences in a letter to be mailed or exchanged personally. Each sentence pattern therein may be identified and the pattern described. Next, we need to look at ways of expanding sentences to make for more clarity in writing. Basically, there are four means of enlarging or expanding sentences regardless of the involved pattern. One approach is to use modifiers

which we touched upon previously. This needs more elaboration in context here. Modifiers can be single word adjectives and adverbs as well as adjective and adverbial phrases. The following has an underlined single word and phrase adjective — The spotted cat with a collar ran down the stairs. The adjective "spotted" tells what kind of cat it was in the sentence. The adjective prepositional phrase "with a collar" tells which cat in the same sentence. Pupils can view illustrations of different kinds of cats and notice those of different colors. Each color in an illustration describes the noun "cat." Pictures of cats may also be viewed to show decorations such as use of collars and selected clothing. Pupils can certainly understand what is meant when the teacher speaks about adjectives modifying nouns. Pupils might describe room decorations which have modifiers. In ideas written, they should identify words which are adjectives.

Adverbs are modifiers, as is true of adjectives, and modify verbs usually, but also adjectives and other adverbs. Adverbs may be single words as well as phrases. In the following sentence, each adverb is underlined: The dog howled rapidly, with great force. The single word adverb "rapidly" tells how the dog howled and modifies the verb "howled." The adverb phrase "with great force" also tells how the dog howled. Oral and written practice with adverbs can be fascinating to many learners.

A second way of expanding any of the five basic sentence patterns is to use appositives. Teaching about appositives can be very meaningful to learners. Consider the following sentence: Bill, the catcher, hit a home run. The word catcher equals Bill which is the subject of the sentence. And yet, there is no verb between the two words. The appositive is set off with commas. Appositives add necessary information to a sentence. Evidently, there was more than one person named "Bill" on the team which made it necessary to add the appositive.

A third way for pupils to expand sentences is use subordination. Consider the following two sentences:

1. Mary was very tired from playing tennis.

2. Mary still watched TV for several hours.

Short, choppy sentences such as these can make for monotonous reading, especially when a reading selection would be of much greater length. The two sentences can be combined into one, making for more enjoyable reading. How can this be done? One of the two sentences may be subordinated to the other with one sentence resulting. For example, "Although Mary was very tired from playing tennis, she still watched TV for several hours." The subordinate clause "Although Mary was very tired form playing tennis" depends upon the independent clause "she still watched TV for several hours." The dependent clause does not stand by itself in terms of meaning. The independent clause does.

A fourth way of expanding sentences has to do with compounding. Adjectives, adverbs, nouns, preposition phrases, and independent clauses can be compounded. In the sentence "The tall and strong man walked briskly," the two underlined words modify the subject "man," also a noun, and are therefore adjectives. Two separate sentences such as the following could have been written:

1. The tall man walked briskly.
2. The strong man walked briskly.

By compounding the adjectives, one sentence results. We can show this same idea with compounding adverbs: The man ate his food quickly and carefully. Both underlined adverbs tell "how" the man ate. The word 'ate' is an adverb. Here, nouns are compounded; Jenny and Alice ate heartily. Prepositional phrases can be compounded as illustrated in the following sentence: Jack walked around the house and in the garden. In this case, both prepositional phrases modify "walked" and are therefore adverb in classification. They tell "where" Jack walked. The following indicates the compounding of independent clauses:

Kay read a book and Evangeline sat in a hammock. Each of the two independent clauses has a subject and predicate which is underlined to

show a clause. "Kay" is the subject in the first sentence while "read" is its verb or predicate while "Evangeline" is the subject and "sat" is its predicate in the second sentence. Both clauses stand by themselves in meaning and are therefore independent.

In Closing

A study of grammar has many merits. Among others, the following are salient:

1. there are practical values such as knowing which verb to use with a subject of the sentence. In standard English, there must be agreement of subject and predicate.

2. there are salient rational reasons for specifically placing modifiers such as adjectives and adverbs in a certain order within a sentence, be they single words or phrases. Adjectives modify nouns whereas adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

3. there are reasons for using a variety of patterns of sentences such as subject - predicate pattern, among others. Sameness and monotony in writing are eliminated by using diverse sentence patterns.

4. there are reasons for expanding sentences regardless of the pattern involved. Not only is there less repetition in what has been written, but also clarity is inherent in oral and written communication when sentences are lengthened through one of four means of expansion.

5. There are reasons for knowing how a language works or operates, in this case the English language. Thought must go in to knowing how a language operates. Further thought must go to implementing what is known about a language.